

Testimony on Raised Senate Bill No. 197
An Act Concerning In-School Suspensions
Committee on Planning and Development
March 10, 2010

Submitted by: Aili Arisco: UCONN MSW Community Organization Concentration

Members of the Committee on Planning and Development,
My name is Aili Arisco. I am a 2nd year full time student at the UCONN School of Social Work. I am here testifying in opposition to Raised Bill. 197, An Act Concerning In-School Suspensions. While many testifying today will offer reasoned and important supporting facts that clarify opposition to delaying the implementation of in school suspension mandates, I am here to offer a personal perspective based on my recent experience with school systems and suspension policies.

In the fall of 2009 I interned at Milner Core Knowledge Academy in the north end of Hartford. For those of you who aren't familiar with Hartford's Albany Avenue neighborhood, Milner is a true "community" school where overwhelmingly children "walk to school" because they live in close proximity. 100% of students live at or below the poverty level and most come from single minority parent households. Many children are DCF involved, have incarcerated parents and struggle with unstable family lives. Milner school is underfunded, understaffed and absent of many needed resources. In comparison to most schools in Connecticut, Milner, by all standards, is challenged to meet the educational needs of students and families each and every day.

Despite all of these constraints, the Milner Core Knowledge Academy administration recognizes the value that a school day structure offers to forward stability for children in an otherwise unsafe community environment as evidenced by their "in school" suspension policy. Student inappropriate non-violent behavior is mediated through in school suspension in a separate room within the facility. Students are restricted from recess and eat their lunch at their desks. It is by all standards, a boring yet productive day as students find themselves with little else to do but their school work.

Clearly, not all schools recognize the need or are willing to find resources to implement an in school suspension policy. Many schools and districts would argue that their staffing and resource capacity is already stretched. They aren't in the business of "disciplining" but rather need to focus their resources on "teaching". I would argue that the best form of discipline is a policy that seeks not only to provide a consequence but also imparts learning. In school suspension tells children they are still valued, out of school suspension sends the message that they aren't worth our time.

Milner Core Knowledge Academy, despite its many overwhelming limitations, undertakes full responsibility for educating students as they struggle with behaviors and attitudes that are not always conducive to classroom productive environment.

In today's economically challenging fiscal environment it is more crucial than ever that school's follow Milner's lead in finding creative ways to implement previously delayed 2007 legislation that asks educators to develop in school suspension policies. As citizens, parents and legislators, we should expect no less from schools with far greater resources than what has been managed by one of the poorest schools in our state.

I strongly urge members of this committee and the legislature to oppose any measures that further delay the advocacy of limited out of school suspension policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony and thank you for your service to the citizens of the great State of Connecticut.

Aili Arisco

UConn MSW Student

Community Organization

Intern of Transitional Services -- Correctional Managed Health Care

University of Connecticut Health Center

263 Farmington Avenue, Farmington, CT 06030